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SUBJECT: SCC WESTON DISCUSSES CYPRUS WITH ITALIAN OFFICIALS

Classified By: POL MC TOM COUNTRYMAN FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In June 11 meetings with Italian MFA officials and Diplomatic Advisors to PM Berlusconi, Special Coordinator for Cyprus Tom Weston, accompanied by Cyprus desk officer Marc Collins, discussed the status of negotiations on Cyprus and pointed out likely turns in the road during Italy's EU presidency. Our Italian interlocutors said that the GOI views the Cyprus issue in the broader terms of transatlantic cooperation. Weston said that the US and the EU should use Turkey's EU membership candidacy as an incentive for Turkey to press for a Cyprus settlement. On UN SecGen Annan's plan, Weston said that the SecGen wants to resume negotiations, but only after an expression of political will by all the parties to support a settlement. Weston urged caution about possible Greek Cypriot attempts to "Europeanize" the Cyprus issue, and reiterated the importance of reaching a settlement by the time of Cyprus, actual EU accession in May 2004, in order to incorporate it into the EU Accession Treaty as needed. END SUMMARY.

Mutual US-EU Understanding on Cyprus

¶2. (C) During a June 11 meeting with Bruno Archi and Francesco Talo, diplomatic advisors to PM Berlusconi, SCC Weston encouraged the Italians to use the long-shared US-EU goal of a Cyprus settlement as a positive factor in restoring transatlantic relations during the Italian EU Presidency. Talo said that the GOI views the Cyprus issue in the broader terms of transatlantic cooperation and is focusing on what actions it can take (i.e., confidence building, institution building measures) during its EU presidency to help further a Cyprus settlement. Integrating new members (such as Cyprus) is a GOI priority during its presidency, Talo said, including facilitating Turkey's EU membership. The GOI remains solidly behind the UN plan, and views spring 2004 as a window of opportunity to reach an agreement.

Dealing with EU Partners

¶3. (C) SCC Weston noted that several recent confidence-building measures announced by the Greek Cypriots to support Turkish Cypriots have not been enthusiastically followed up on. Claims by the new Greek Cypriot president Papadopoulos that the UN plan needed changes, leading to maneuvers to "Europeanize" the plan, have thus far been unsuccessful, SCC Weston said, but will bear careful watching. Papadopoulos needs to commit to SecGen Annan before this fall's UNGA that he is prepared to finalize a settlement plan in early 2004 that could then go to referendum before May 2004, SCC Weston said. In Turkey, the reform effort needs to be strengthened, so that PM Erdogan may strengthen his political position and overcome resistance from the &Deep State8 in pushing for a Cyprus deal. While PM Erdogan knows the Cyprus question must be resolved, he has not grasped that it is in Turkey's interest to settle by May rather than December 2004. The outcome of the Turkish Cypriot elections in December may work to PM Erdogan's advantage in pushing for a settlement, SCC Weston said.

¶4. (C) Archi noted that the European Commission report on Turkey's EU candidacy was due in October. A positive report could lead to the start of negotiations, which could impact the Cyprus standoff. Talo commented that building EU members' support, particularly in Germany, for Turkey's membership would be important. Weston added that, while the current Greek government has played a positive role, the GOG is still developing its relationship with the newly elected Greek Cypriot president Papadopoulos. The Greek Cypriot position will likely become more entrenched once Cyprus joins Greece in the EU. Should the idea of an EU envoy or special negotiator resurface at the EU Summit in Thessalonika, SCC Weston stressed that it would be unworkable to have a Greek candidate serve in that capacity.

Expression of Political Will

¶5. (C) SCC Weston presented Amb. Paolo Pucci di Benisichi, Director General, MFA Bureau for Europe, with a brief review of developments on Cyprus and a timeline of turns in the road during the Italian EU presidency. Weston said that the UN SecGen seeks to resume negotiations based on the Annan plan,

but first wants a demonstration of political will by all the parties, which would include finalization of the plan and dates to put it to a referendum. Weston noted that so far only the Greek Cypriots have expressed the necessary political will.

16. (C) Pucci di Benisichi commented that the architecture of the Annan plan was good because it made balanced, acceptable

concessions to both the Turkish and the Greek Cypriots. Unfortunately, the plan had not succeeded, largely because Turkey was not prepared to accept it, he said. Denktash was in a relatively comfortable situation as leader of the &TRNC,8 and wasn't willing to give up his leadership control in a reunified Cyprus, according to Pucci di Benisichi. In addition, PM Erdogan was not able to continue his support for the plan once he became PM, due to the strategic influence of the TGS in Turkish society, he explained. Finally, Turkey did not want to weaken its bargaining position on Cyprus without first knowing its future in the EU. Despite Turkey's lack of political will, Pucci di Benisichi said it would be a mistake to pursue other solutions apart from the Annan plan. The opening of the green line had been a positive step in providing for direct relations between both sides, but such confidence-building measures should not substitute for a final settlement. PM Berlusconi had offered to help bring the parties together to develop contacts and strengthen relations within the context of the Annan plan, he said.

Turkish Intentions -----

17. (C) SCC Weston agreed with Pucci di Benisichi's assessment, but said that the US had a different perception of PM Erdogan's actions. PM Erdogan changed his position on the Annan plan largely because of the Turkish parliament's vote on Iraq, according to SCC Weston. He noted that PM Erdogan is facing a leadership crisis within his Justice and Development Party (AKP) and, thus, is attempting to pass a reform package that would establish civilian control over the military. If successful, PM Erdogan will not only increase his power within the AKP, but also advance Turkey's possibility for EU accession, which PM Erdogan has chosen to make a key measure of his party's success. The US and the EU should use PM Erdogan's strong desire for EU accession as a lever to pressure Turkey into pursuing a Cyprus settlement. Erdogan needs to focus on December 2004 rather than May 2004 to ensure a settlement is incorporated into the accession treaty. The Greek Cypriots will not be as willing to compromise after May, he noted.

Greek Cypriot Maneuvering -----

18. (C) On the Greek Cypriot side, SCC Weston pointed out the possibility of Greek Cypriot President Papadopoulos pursuing changes in the Annan plan. SCC Weston said that the US will continue to press the Greek Cypriots to demonstrate the necessary political will for a settlement based on the Annan plan. In order for the U.S. to pressure Turkey, the Greek Cypriots need to suggest dates for referendum and support measures aimed at improving the standard of living for Turkish Cypriots. Weston noted the importance of finalizing the plan by January 2004, and holding a referendum prior to May 2004 in order to incorporate a settlement into the EU Accession Treaty. Once a settlement is written into the Treaty, there is a much better chance of sustaining the agreement in the face of legal challenges from European courts.

19. (C) SCC Weston has cleared this cable.
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